

EMA Survey Results:

Energy Management & Covid-19



No one could have predicted that the new decade would start with such a challenge and that a couple of months into 2020 we will find ourselves in such unprecedented circumstances. The majority of energy management world is on lockdown and everyone has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in some way. For some, the lockdown meant a gradual close-down of operations, while others shut down in a rush. Many organisations still play a critical role and must continue to operate, even if with restricted operations.

The EMA sounded out its membership on the impact of the pandemic on their operations and teams, as well as their reflections and tips on how to cope during this period. Energy management is often about pitfalls and opportunities, and the survey responses suggest that energy managers are already identifying the highs and lows that the lockdown is presenting. Whether it is the fact that the energy consumption and travel have gone down, or that there is more time available to develop future policies and proposals, here are the most frequent responses from the survey...

The lockdown - direct effects:

Many of the planned energy improvement initiatives we had planned for 2020 are currently on hold.

It is more a case of Business as Required rather than Business as Usual.

The focus on energy reduction is relaxed during this period as the main focus is on dealing with the pandemic.

We are unable to trade, 95% of the business is in shutdown.

Now having twice weekly conference calls with directors to update on cash flow and billing for energy and water. So, that's a bonus.

Energy saving projects are affected due to the reduced on-site presence. We are attempting to maintain activity where possible. Operation & maintenance of renewable generation assets is business as usual. Resource levels aren't affecting this part of the team, yet.

Projects have stopped. Some meters can't be read.

Everything back to 1975 pace. I am old enough to remember those days...

All sites and offices are all fully closed down with all heating and electric equipment switched off.

We cancelled any non-essential presence-based tasks (on-site auditing, routine meetings etc.) and prioritised operational, financial and business continuity activities.

Government measures seemed to have increased water consumption across Wales, which is increasing energy demand.

The lockdown - tips to consider:

Energy management is not the top of everyone's list of 'important' things to do at the moment' - be pushy.

Ensure skeleton staff know and understand the changes made.

Continuous data review - ensure that all sites are shutdown correctly, especially the ones that benefit from a BMS, as this could affect consumption going forward if indeed any scheduling has not been reviewed.

Daily monitoring of sub-meters has identified areas of focus. Skeleton teams are given specific tasks to check areas.

Continue a water flushing regime and heat water to prevent the proliferation of bacterial growth in water systems.

The lockdown will enable true base loads to be measured. Identify plant/equipment that should be switched off which will assist in setting reduced targets.

Ensure staff are aware of procedures for shutting the office back down should they need to go in and use it for any reason.

The hiatus in work frees up time to focus on time consuming measures such as writing in depth policies, it could actually prove a useful chance to broaden the energy management strategy.

Consider what interim maintenance needs to be carried out even though the building is shutdown.

Continue to work on business cases, etc. in the background, but now is not the time to promote these.

Look for opportunities - there are some things you can't do right now. What could you do which you otherwise might have made time for? I'm thinking about future energy strategy for the site and catching up on some data analysis.

The lockdown and beyond:

Remote working might become more prevalent. The majority of systems including M&T and BMS can all be accessed remotely, meaning most tasks can be completed. Rapid increase in use of video conferencing etc. has shown that these can be effective means of communication.

The price of oil, electricity and gas has collapsed. This could temporarily weaken the impact of energy management on an organisation, particularly if bottom lines have also suffered and staff resources are being downsized.

As the economy struggles to recover, then energy management practices may be lower down the pecking order than previous compared to other perceived priority obligations of organisations. It will be difficult to ensure that energy management is considered to be worthwhile exercise and management personnel will not have this high on the agenda.

It will highlight the environmental changes which are visible in the current situation (such as noise and air quality).

It will be a good measure of what can be achieved in a complete 'switch-off' scenario, perhaps leading to a better and more considerate energy management behaviours going forward.

Energy use in work premises will be greatly reduced raising fundamental questions around working practices and future use of work spaces. For example, why lease a large office building if you had a rotor of people working from home. Business travel, currently virtually zero - companies need to revisit the need for business travel and develop guidance to significantly reduce this in the future. The current situation shows that business meetings can effectively be carried out remotely.

Postponing implementing energy saving measures and potentially shelving them to free up cash to recover from impact the virus has had on the business.

Once re-opened it should be business as normal, however more emphasis may be on saving costs to make up for lost business.

The main impact is delayed decision making for medium to long term plans. Getting the executive team to re-focus on long term plans is hard anyway and in the current climate impossible. However, that doesn't stop me getting the papers ready now so that when we can think ahead again, we have options.

An ideal opportunity to look at base energy loads of buildings and examine areas of energy wastage and make comparisons with operational figures. Also, the need for buildings / overall capacity related to staff numbers could be fundamentally rethought in relation to home working.

Thank you for taking part.



On a lighter note:

Don't sit too close to the fridge!

How are we going to get haircuts?

Have to talk to my wife a lot more!!